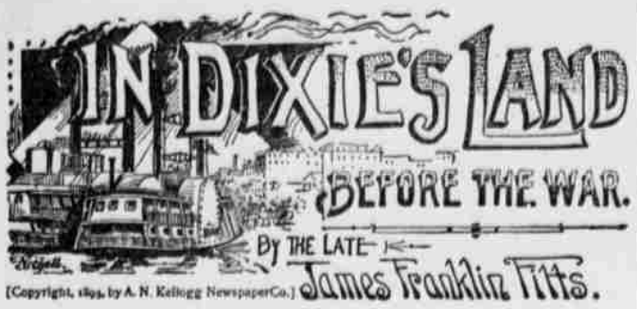

CHAPTER VII.
A MYSTERIOUS FEUD.

The manner and language of Mr. Dorion did but increase my anxiety to hear all that he could tell about my strange benefactor. To overcome his reluctance, I gave him the story of my life as it has been set forth in the previous chapters, dwelling much upon the deep impression that Mr. Bostock's liberality and his interest in me had produced, how for years I had cherished the hope of joining him here, the difficulties I had overcome to do so, and my present deep disappointment. My account evidently touched the listener.

"I see I must tell you what I know. You have a plain right to be told. The whole story has grown into the most disagreeable recollection of my life, and with any ordinary inquirer I should ignore the whole business. And if you will hear it, you must be warned, at the start, that it will furnish what I should think will be good reasons why you should now abandon your search for Pierce Bostock. Shall I go on?"

"By all means."

I will put the narrative in his own language, as nearly as possible.

My acquaintance with Bostock began about the year 1841, when he came up here from Louisiana to look for a cotton plantation that would suit him. The account that he gave of himself was, I have no doubt, strictly true. He had been raising sugar almost all his life in La Fourche district of Louisiana, and he desired a change. He proposed to keep his great plantation there under the charge of a competent overseer, and to live here. He must be immensely wealthy; for seeing and liking this plantation he paid cash for it. If you'll look over it with me in the morning, you can easily make up your mind that it required a fortune to do that.

He removed here that September, bringing some of his house servants. He had two children—an infant in its nurse's arms, little Coralie, of whom you will presently hear more; and a son, Conrad, then fifteen years old.

He never said much about his wife. In fact, he never named her of his own accord; to those who thought they had the right to ask questions, he invariably replied that she was Parisian born, and could not live away from Paris, even with her husband and children. All understood from this that it was a case where husband and wife had "agreed to disagree."

I never could see that any one of the numerous slave women that were about this house in those days occupied the position of housekeeper. There were two or three of them who were quite capable of it; but Bostock was accustomed to get along in an easy indulgent way, without anyone to look sharply after the household affairs. So there was waste, extravagance and confusion, as there always will be where there is an indulgent master, and no white woman to hold the rein over a lot of idle, shiftless darkies.

The boy Conrad I had better dispose of at once. It has been many years since I saw him. I certainly never want to see him again. He was a wild, undutiful fellow, and in continual difficulty with his father. When he was twenty he disappeared. I presume that Mr. Bostock knew where he went; but he never mentioned him and nobody cared to know. If there could be such a thing as a born gambler, I should say that Conrad

THE NARRATIVE.

Bostock was one. When but sixteen he would go to Vicksburg and spend days and nights there, in the lowest resorts along the river. He never seemed to me to stand in the least awe of his father, but Mr. Bostock always appeared uneasy when he was about. When he went away there was a rumor that he received a large sum of money from his father upon condition that he should never return. This may have been mere rumor; I only know that the people about here never did see him again, and that I, knowing as much as anybody of the family in those days, never saw the least sign of affection between father and son.

To a person who had never seen Pierce Bostock, all this would naturally convey an unfavorable impression. It would be said that there seemed to be something unexplained, and that the man's life could not have been what it ought to have been. To you, who saw him at the time that everybody was charmed and captivated by him, I can say that we hardly bestowed a thought on these things. The man made friends with everybody. This house was Goodfellow's hall to the men; if the ladies could not come here because there was no Mrs. Bostock, nor even a housekeeper, they nevertheless spoke of its master as the most gallant and agreeable of men. Especially was this so after he had got rid of his scapegrace son. There seemed then to be not a cloud in his sky. He was cheerful, even hilarious, the idol of his friends, owning the finest cotton lands in middle Mississippi. You have heard something of southern hospitality; you should have seen for yourself how it was dispensed here in the days of Pierce Bostock.

Yet I have not named the chief source of this man's happiness. It was his daughter Coralie.

She was about fifteen when I last saw her; she must be in the vicinity of eighteen now.

My young friend, you'll agree that I am rather too old a man to go into any raptures about female beauty. You saw my wife and daughters; they are good enough for me; they are my models among women. Yet I must say that Coralie Bostock, when I last saw her, was the finest girl that I ever laid eyes on; and I suppose that she is today the most beautiful one at the south.

There are not many pure native blondes among us; she is one. But her hair, her eyes, her eyebrows and long lashes are dark as midnight.

She was slender, but not petite, in figure; her smile would captivate you; her laugh was more musical than the song of the mocking bird. Her manners were winning and gracious, even from a little girl.

She seemed the very apple of her father's eye. At one time he took her down to New Orleans, and left her with the Sisters of the Sacred Heart to be educated. But he could not do without her. In less than a month he had brought her home, and from that time he had her teachers here in the house half the year. She learned quickly; music and the languages seemed to come to her like a second nature. And never did child more warmly reciprocate a parent's lavish affection than did Coralie that of her father.

Time passed on, and that fatal April of 1861 came round.

Bostock had issued invitations for a gentleman's dinner party. I was invited, of course. Alphonse Basnet, a Frenchman owning the plantation adjoining the one I then occupied, called on me in the morning, and asked me if I should attend Bostock's party.

I told him that I should.

"Well," he said, "I want your advice. I am asked, too. A countryman of mine, Castex by name, who has lived in Louisiana, and more lately in Arba, arrived at my place yesterday. When I told him of my invitation he became greatly interested and asked me to take him along."

"Take him, then. That, I believe, is one of the usages of society the world over."

"Yes, to be sure; but Castex leads me to think that he has known our host before. He has asked me fifty questions about him. He seems much more interested than he naturally would be, growing out of any ordinary acquaintance in past years. I must take him, of course. What I want you to advise me about is: Shall I go over and speak to Mr. Bostock this morning about him?"

I was on the point of advising Alphonse to do so, by all means, as I certainly should have done had Castex been my visitor. I have often thought, that, had I obeyed my impulse, the bloody combat that has been described to you might have been avoided. Then came the reluctance to interfere in a matter of other men's social responsibilities, and I declined to advise him. Alphonse returned home, and his guest accompanied him to the dinner-party unheralded.

It so happened that these two arrived last. With them there were thirteen in the parlors, the host making the fourteenth. All who had been invited were present, save one; and I remember that as Mr. Castex was presented to the company, there was much remark and jest about our good luck in having him there, so as to avoid the awkward thirteen at the table.

When he was introduced to the host, a different scene occurred. Mr. Bostock started, changed color, withdrew his proffered hand and made a slight bow instead. Castex smiled, bowed, and turned away. In my eyes he had a most disagreeable face, and the smile was very nearly a sneer.

It was an awkward incident, and threw a chill over the party at the start; for everybody observed it. Still, there was no outbreak just then. Dinner was soon announced, and Mr. Bostock led the way to the hall.

The host was at the head of the table, of course; I happened to be at the foot. Next on the right of the head was a doctor; next sat Basnet, his friend beside him.

The soup had but just been served when Coralie, then but twelve years old, came to an open door and stood an instant. She evidently desired to speak to her father, but, seeing that he and his guests were seated, she went away.

Castex saw her, and stared at her. Directing the attention of Bostock to her, he put a question to him in French. It was answered in the affirmative.

Basnet says that the question was: "Is that your child, monsieur?"

Then, upon receiving the reply, Castex leaned over the angle of the table and made a rapid rejoinder also in French. Basnet distinguished the words "Wife," "arranged" and "New Orleans." More than these nobody understood.

Nobody but the host. The remark, whatever it was, was for his ears, and he heard every word of it. He looked at Castex—horror, indignation, hate, were in the look. The attention of the whole table was fastened upon the scene.

Gentlemen," said Bostock, "something very disagreeable has occurred. I could pardon much in a man sitting at my table and eating my salt; but I say now that either Napoleon Castex or I must leave this table. Well knowing that his presence in my house and at my board would be idlocy, he has taken advantage of a social license to force himself upon me. That I could endure in silence, out of regard for my friends, that nothing unseemly might occur here. But he is not content with that exhibition of his malignant heart; he has just this moment put upon me an insult which I cannot and will not tolerate. If I could I know not what next to expect from him. I repeat it—either he or I must leave this table."

In the painful silence that succeeded this startling speech, all eyes were fixed on Castex. He rose from his seat, cool and smiling.

"It pleases me very much to retire," he said. "Witness it, messieurs!—yonder *gentleman* drives me from his table and his house."

He bowed, and immediately left the room. Alphonse Basnet squirmed in his chair, and at last blurted out:

"Bostock, my dear fellow—excuse me—but you see I can't remain. This is a wretched business; I hope it will end here. But I brought my friend here, and of course I must go with him."

And he did. The soup grew cold, and was removed untasted; course after course of the choicest dishes succeeded and were hardly touched. Everybody was under a dreadful constraint; occasionally there was a solitary remark, but the effort to keep up a conversation was a flat failure. I have said so much, that I ought to tell the whole truth. When the wine appeared, the guests turned to it as a relief from the awkwardness of the situation. I presume everybody drank too much; I am certain that I did. I will except Bostock. He sat pale, rigid and silent through it all. The guests departed early, with hardly an effort to make the usual compliments to the host.

The next morning I was hardly out of bed when Pierce Bostock walked in. He looked as stern and white as when he was denouncing Castex at his own table.

"Well, he's challenged you," was my salutation.

"No. I shall challenge him. Here's the note. Take it to him, and then go to the man that he names as his friend."

I was thunderstruck. I tried to remonstrate with him. I told him that, so far as an outsider could judge, if anybody had cause to send a challenge, it was Castex. I begged him to tell me, in the strict confidence of friendship, what the language was that Castex had uttered to him. I told him that I could not act intelligently for him in this matter, unless I was advised. He peremptorily refused to tell me.

"You have been my friend, Dorion," he said. "When I say to you that no human being must know my cause of offense, you will believe that there is the best of reason for my silence. Napoleon Castex knows, no man better knows, the nature of his offense. He knows me, also; and he understands that if he were to flap a hint of my reasons for challenging him, I would seek him and shoot him down like a dog! Don't argue with me, Alfred Dorion; I tell you the man is a cold-blooded scoundrel; he has sought me out to force a quarrel upon me, and there are the best of reasons why the affair must go on."

There was nothing for me to do but to deliver the challenge. I found Castex cool, polite and consenting.

"There is not one of my name," he said, with his marked French accent, "who ever refused the request of a gentleman to meet him on the field of honor. M. Bostock thinks himself insulted. Some might think that I was. No matter; here is his challenge. Take it to my dear Alphonse; he will arrange everything with you. I only say to you, that my remark to M. Bostock was the truth. He knows it to be the truth; and he has not the grace to see that I put it in the language of la belle France, that others might not understand it. So much you may tell him, if you choose."

The affair went on to its frightful end. Nobody could discover the truth. Basnet tried his best to make his man divulge the cause of offense, but in vain.

"I only told him the truth, and told it in French, that it might not be heard by others. After I have fought him, I will tell it very loudly, in your harsh English, do you be sure. Meanwhile, I am quite willing to fight him. I knew him long before you did."

The wound that Pierce Bostock received was as nearly fatal as a wound can be and leave the victim alive. The ball traversed his lung; nothing but the extraordinary skill of the doctor saved him. The doctor had served in the Mexican war, and happened to witness the successful operation of a Mexican surgeon upon a similar wound of Gen. Shields, by cleansing it with a silk handkerchief. In this way Bostock's life was saved; but the fever that followed confined him to his bed for weeks, drained his strength, and left him only the shadow of his former self.

His affection for his daughter seemed doubled, if that were possible, by this dreadful experience. In every waking hour he wanted her with him. In his delirium he would call her name; when conscious, he would hold her hand and look silently into her face as she sat by his bed.

I used often to call upon him while he was confined to the house. One day he sent Coralie out of the room and asked me to shut the door.

"You are still my friend, Alfred Dorion—are you not?" he abruptly began.

"To be sure I am. While I am dreadfully distressed by what has happened—"

"No matter about that. I want you to tell me something. What happened after I got that man's bullet? I think my senses were wandering. What did I say?"

I told him. I repeated his expressions—that he regretted that he had killed Castex; that he wanted to spare him; that he was anxious to hear from him a retraction of the words which had caused the duel. His face darkened as he listened.

"Do you mean to say that I said all that silly stuff?"

"I have only repeated your own words."

"Then my brain was wandering, Dorion, I meant to kill him. He has gone to be judged, as I must be one day; but, I tell you, I am not sorry he has gone. He well knew when he came up here with his malignant tongue that either his life or mine must be forfeited."

You can imagine what effect such a declaration had on me. It showed me a side of Bostock's character that I had never suspected to exist. I began to draw away from him, as did others of his friends.

In less than two years after the duel he had alienated himself from all of us. His nature seemed to have changed. He became cold, reserved and haughty. He was very little seen away from his home. When he removed to Louisiana, he passed away from all intercourse with his old friends here. He has answered no letters. When I bought this place, I negotiated with him through an agent.

You can see, knowing all this, that his life before he came here was clouded with something fearful and mysterious. I have wearied my brain in conjecturing what it can be. His wife, Conrad, Coralie,—which of them does it affect—or does it relate to all of them?

If you can guess, you are shrewder than I.

CHAPTER VIII
BETWEEN DUTY AND TEMPTATION.

I slept very soundly that night. The experience and revelations of the last twenty-four hours had been to me more

I WAS LIGHTED WITH A PAIR OF TALL WAX CANDLES.

than incomprehensible; they were staggering. I tried to think about the astounding story that Mr. Dorion had told me, after I had bidden him good night, and had been lighted with a pair of tall wax tapers up a broad stairway to a large, square bed-chamber, where a great high-posted, canopied and curtained bed awaited me. I say I tried to think of it; but I could make nothing of it; I speedily gave it up, and lapsed away into slumber.

Bodily and mentally, I was tired, and I slept late. I was aroused by a prolonged knocking at my chamber-door, through which ran a continual current of negro-talk.

"Please, young maussa, would you get up an' come down to breakfast? Maussa Dorion say, wake yo' up easy; an' yo' pass out yo' boots to be shined."

When, an hour later, I was seated at the planter's hospitable table, it seemed as though I had been at home here for a year. Mr. Dorion, clad in a loose linen suit, his wife and three daughters, all pleasant, cool and at least one of them handsome, entertained me with easy and agreeable conversation. It warms my heart now to think of this, my first agreeable introduction to southern hospitality. As for the feast that was spread on that board—I despair of conveying an adequate idea of its profusion. I was the "stranger within their gates:" I was therefore entitled to all that they could set before me. Coffee, and milk, bacon, eggs, white and corn bread, fish from the river, hominy—where shall I stop? I had an appetite; but it soon surrendered before the great supply that loaded the table.

After breakfast, Mr. Dorion took me out on the shady west veranda, and smoked. I declined the weed, and he good-humoredly said:

"You'll have to learn, youngster, if you're going to stay in the south. Like the morning cocktail, tobacco is a social force here. And you've been here at my plantation fourteen hours and haven't said a word about politics or slavery. I am beginning to doubt whether you are northern born or not."

I saw that he was bantering me, but I replied, seriously:

"I have never voted yet, and I know nothing about politics. As to slavery, I hope to get some information about it. I have very little yet."

He clapped me heartily on the shoulder.

"You talk like a sensible young fellow. I wish all this noise in congress and in the press could stop, and that the northerners could come down here, and see what slavery is like. Come along with me, and I'll show you a little of it."

We went back to the negro-quarters; a small street of comfortable white cabins. As we passed through, the darkies ran out to see "Ole Maussa." The young children, with hardly an apology of cotton clothing to hide their blackness, laughed and chatted round him. Withered old crones and rheumatic "uncles" hobbled to the doors to see him. Lusty young negroes and negresses gathered about him, eagerly discussing the prospects of "the crop."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Ladies' nickle plated skates at Hodge Bros.

The Girl's Pleasant Part.

"Mr. Lilliboy gave me a pearl hat pin for a Christmas present."

"What did you give him?"

"Permission to give it."—Chicago News.

A Dissatisfied Boy.

Mr. Hojack—Surely, Johnny, you are not crying with all those Christmas presents that Santa Claus has brought you?

Johnny (between sobs)—There isn't (boo-hoo!) anything to make a (boo-hoo!) noise with.—Harper's Bazar.

Holiday Rates.

The Santa Fe announces a rate of one and one third fare for the round trip for the holidays to all points on their line within two hundred miles. Tickets will be sold on December 23, 24, 25, 30, and 31, 1893, and January 1, 1894, final limit for return on all tickets Jan. 3rd 1894. J. D. SWEENEY, Agent.

Teachers Meeting at Topeka.

For the above meeting, the Santa Fe will sell tickets to Topeka and return at a rate of one and one third fare for the round trip on December 26, and 27th limit for return to January 3rd, 1894. Chair cars run through between Abilene and Topeka in both directions.

J. D. SWEENEY, Agent.

Texas Wants You.

That is why the Santa Fe has originated the Home Seekers Excursions which are to be run each month during the coming winter to all points in Texas.

The rates will be one fare for the round trip. Date of first excursion will be December 12, then January 9, February 13, March 13, April 10, and May 8.

All tickets good for 30 days from dates of sale with stopover privileges on the going trip at any point south of the Kansas line.

Write to Geo. T. Nicholson, General Passenger and Ticket Agent, Topeka, Kansas for Folders and Circulars. Call on J. D. Sweeney, Local Agent for information in regard to the excursions.